

Starting and Sustaining Character Education Initiatives in Schools



Intended for reading by school-level character education committees, this section of the book explains, step by step, how to build a successful program of character and ethical development for all stakeholders in the school community. Committees just getting started in character education may want to use this book as a guidebook, following it closely as they plan their initiatives. On the other hand, committees with more established programs may want to use the book more for ideas on refining and rejuvenating their schools' efforts. Whether your school has just started the planning process or has had a thriving initiative for several years, the principles and strategies on the following pages can help focus and strengthen your school's efforts to build a school community of caring, kindness, and respect.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 1

All adults in the school are committed to modeling and teaching good character.

When teachers are asked about the best classes they have taught, they will not always talk about the high-achieving class where all

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students were working above their grade level. Instead, teachers often refer to their favorite classes as being composed of kind, caring, respectful students who worked well together.

The way we measure the success of a student is not always by looking at his or her grades. Perhaps we should focus on the education of the total child, and this includes character. To commit

to modeling and teaching students good character is to commit to educating a generation of ethically and socially competent people.

Character education should not be another add-on program on the plate of the educator. Instead, character education should be an exciting initiative that is infused into the school culture. This excitement starts with the school's administration. If the leadership commits to modeling and leading the initiative, we believe the great majority of the other stakeholders will follow and assume leadership roles in the initiative.

But it cannot be just a top-down approach from the administration. All adult stakeholders in the building must commit to modeling and teaching the importance of developing a personal culture of ethical and social excellence. The coach models and demands sportsmanship from all athletes. The band teacher creates a climate in which band members put in extra practice time in order to meet excellence in their performances. The fifth-grade students have lunch with all kindergarten students regularly as a means of passing on the importance of caring about each other. All of this excellence is developed by caring adults who model, teach, and demand a higher standard of excellence from their students.

In order to make character education a crucial part of the education of all children, the improvement of the social and ethical

climate of the school should be a priority and should be included in the school improvement plan. If we are focusing on improving the academics of students in our school, then we must surely give attention to focusing on the social and ethical climate of our school. As previously noted, the improvement of the social and ethical climate of our schools may be the precursor to a rising of academic excellence; if teachers have more time to teach, students have more time to learn.

Principle 1 Strategies

- Form a character education committee comprising a core group of individuals in the school who are willing and dedicated to establishing the character education initiative, and who are themselves models of good character. This group will not be solely responsible for the implementation of the initiative. However, they will be responsible for the initial research and structuring of the initiative.
- Direct the character education committee to research the subject of character education (theory, history, and examples of successful implementation). This knowledge will be useful when making decisions regarding the school's character education initiative and when providing staff development.
- Involve the principal, assistant principal(s), and guidance counselor(s) in the character education initiative, as they are crucial in setting the tone for the school.
- Involve the entire staff in developing a vision for their school. Provide them time to brainstorm and develop a clear vision for what the school climate should look like. When everyone is involved, multiple points of view evolve, and there is a greater likelihood that everyone involved will buy into the vision that is created.
- After a vision is developed, the principal must provide the time and resources that are needed to carry out the planning and implementation of the character education initiative. This time can be found in different places, such as common planning time for grade levels or departments, a scheduled time for

character education on the staff development agenda, or setting up workshops. Resources can take the form of books, guest speakers, attendance at conferences, or anything else the staff needs to improve their knowledge and skills.

- Ensure the school improvement plan displays a salient character education approach. The character education vision should be developed into clear goals that are listed in the school improvement plan along with specific strategies for achieving them.
- Secure a commitment from staff to consistently reinforce good character. Staff should be role models of character when interacting with each other and with the students. Staff should also use a common character education language and expect all students to show good character in all settings.
- Expect teachers to infuse the teaching of character throughout their subjects. Character should not be treated as an individual subject; instead, it should be taught through the curriculum and through the use of “teachable moments.”
- Reinforce character education concepts when disciplining students. The language used in the character education initiative should be the same language used in office referrals and during discipline-related conversations with students and parents.
- Expect guidance counselors to reinforce character education with class lessons as well as individual student interactions. Guidance counselors should not be solely responsible for teaching character education lessons; however, their lessons are a perfect opportunity to reinforce good character.
- Expect office staff to display polite behavior in all interactions and to acknowledge it in students who are visiting the office. Interaction with the office staff is often the first form of communication that visitors and parents have with the school. This interaction is a great time to display an atmosphere of character.
- Enlist bus drivers in the reinforcement of good character. They can set the tone for students since they are the first people to see students in the morning. Drivers can reinforce good character by assigning bus monitors, who can model good character and acknowledge it in others. Consider inviting

drivers to a safety assembly to highlight positive bus behavior as well as to show appreciation for what the drivers do each day.

- Ask custodians and cafeteria workers to reinforce character education by modeling and demanding respect. Cafeterias are a place to demonstrate good table manners, and the custodians, lunch monitors, and cafeteria workers can reinforce the importance of this issue.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 2

A committee representing all stakeholders directs the school's character education initiative.

At least 81 percent of Maryland public schools report having an active character education initiative. In all schools, solid school leadership can make the difference between a character effort that occurs in a few classrooms and a character education initiative that influences the entire school community. School-level character education committees can provide this

needed leadership and direction. The school character education committee, and especially its chair, must be committed to the goal of creating a respectful and responsible school community. Committee members should believe and expect that the character education initiative will be

given the same priority as academic and

behavior expectations. In fact, the character education initiative can provide the foundation for improved academics and behavior. Most often, school character initiatives are led by school counselors.

Character education does relate closely to the job duties of the school counselor, but in order to be effective, character education must also be “owned” and directed by teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Through an effective and active character education committee, the school's character education initiative will have a definite and deliberate direction that supports a positive school climate.

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Principle 2 Strategies

- Establish a school character education committee that includes stakeholders from the school building and community.
- Invite committee members from each main area of the school. For example, a representative from each grade level, guidance, special subjects, and administration should participate. Ideally, custodial and cafeteria staff are represented as well.
- Invite a parent and a student from each grade level to serve on the committee.
- Include the school principal as an active member of the committee.
- Invite the district character education coordinator to each meeting and/or forward him or her the minutes of the meeting.
- If the district coordinator cannot attend every meeting, consider inviting him or her to one meeting each year to help direct the character education initiative and ensure it is aligned with the district initiative.
- Hold committee meetings regularly, about every four to six weeks.
- Appoint a committee secretary to keep and distribute minutes of the meetings to all of the staff. Consider including relevant portions of the committee's meeting minutes into the character education column of the school newsletter.
- Ask committee members to report back to their respective constituencies (e.g., grade levels, other community members, other parents) about the character education minutes and ask for input and suggestions.
- Ask committee members to share the feedback from their constituencies to enable the committee to make informed decisions based on input from all stakeholders.
- Rotate committee members on and off, leaving a core group that has a history of directing the character education initiative while new members are being acclimated to the initiative.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 3

A character education action plan is an integral part of the school improvement plan.

The Character Education Partnership defines character education on its Web site as “the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts, and states to instill in their students important core, ethical values that we all share...” Accordingly, the school’s character education initiative must have a specific plan that targets the needs of the school and its stakeholders. Without a solid plan, the process of character education will not occur.

Every school in Maryland creates some type of school improvement plan, and the character education initiative should be an integral part of it. The school action plan should be based on the district character plan and should integrate the process of character

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education into all parts of the school. The action plan should be ongoing, spanning from three to five years, but with regular infusions of new strategies to keep the initiative fresh. The school character education committee, with input from all stakeholders, should create the action plan. The district character education coordinator should also be involved to ensure the school plan supports the district plan, and that all stakeholders are working to achieve shared goals. However, each school should tailor its plan to its own needs.

As with the district plan, the school character education plan should be based on the individual needs of the school. Therefore, a needs assessment, using the multiple character education needs assessment tools available, should be completed before the action plan is written. The results of this needs assessment, whether behavior, academic, etc., need to be addressed in every area of the school, starting with the most troublesome first and expanding into those areas that could eventually benefit from the improved climate brought about by the character education initiative. Assessment components should be incorporated into the plan yearly to be sure the goals of the plan are being met. Yearly adjustments to these goals will be necessary to keep the plan current with the changes occurring within the school community.

Principle 3 Strategies

- Complete a needs assessment for your school to pinpoint the areas the character education action plan should address first.
- The Character Education Partnership (CEP) Web site, www.character.org, has many downloadable resources, such as *The Eleven Principles Sourcebook*, that schools can use to assess their needs.
- Once the needs assessment is complete, use the results along with input from Character Education Committee members to write the action plan.
- When writing the plan, create achievable strategies that directly relate to the goals established by the needs assessment results.
- Consult the district character education coordinator to align the school's action plan with the district plan.
- Span the action plan over three to five years to assure quality strategies and activities are added each year.
- Assess the new strategies implemented each year, as well as the original strategies, to determine if the character education goals are being met.
- Adjust strategies and activities annually based on the evaluation results.

Theory into Practice

Pocomoke Middle School in Worcester County created a character education action plan as part of their Accreditation For Growth (AFG) initiative. The pillars of the school's AFG initiative are character education, academics, technology, and parent involvement. Each pillar of the initiative is run by a committee of staff members. The character education committee, which represents each area of the school as well as parent and student representatives, implements and monitors the character education plan.

Pocomoke designed its character education plan with the following categories: activity, person responsible, timeline, resources needed, and date completed. Activities were described over a five-year period (2003 to 2008), with new ones being added each year to

enhance and refresh the program. As a result, everyone is clear on what needs to happen and when, and there is a level of accountability for following through on character education. The action plan was written by Pocomoke's central AFG committee, which consisted of the committee chairmen and the school's administration. The character education committee implemented the action plan under the direction of its chairman, a school counselor.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 4

The core of the character education initiative focuses on relationships.

According to Geneva Gay, author of *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (2000), a crucial element of a culturally competent school is its ability to build and sustain relationships among its stakeholders. Character education researchers have supported this idea by emphasizing the importance of adults building relationships centered on respect, responsibility, and caring with each other and with students.

In today's culture, students as well as adults are in need of positive role models of civility and caring. Far too many of our students are living in homes and communities that have few examples of positive models. These role models are needed to help students build the habits and attitudes essential for academic and social competence. It

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is imperative, as educators and role models, that we teach and model the character traits that have contributed to our success as caring, committed educators. Whether we like it or not, we as the adults in a building are role models to the students, just as athletes are role models to sports fans whether they choose it or not. (Former Baltimore Oriole Cal Ripken Jr., who understood this much more than most, addressed it eloquently in his Baseball Hall of Fame induction speech.)

Principle 4 Strategies

- Discuss regularly, in team and staff meetings, the importance of modeling and teaching character to all stakeholders. A book such as Hal Urban's *Life's Greatest Lessons* would be a wonderful faculty read.
- Recognize students for improving their behavior or developing responsible habits, such as turning in homework. (Many schools use reinforcement programs in conjunction with a positive behavioral initiative.) Recognize adults in the building, too, for modeling responsible and civil behavior. This recognition for students and adults can be as simple as a kind word or note.
- Emphasize to all stakeholders the essential role that positive staff-to-staff, staff-to-students, and student-to-student relationships play in forging a positive school climate.
- As administrators set the tone for a school, focus extra attention on administrator-staff and administrator-student relationships.
- Plan regular social events for staff to reinforce the character and climate of the school.
- Hold ceremonies to recognize students who excel in character education traits and values.
- Provide students opportunities, through literature and narratives, to observe and discuss character strengths and flaws.
- Remind teachers and staff to be "warm demanders." Teachers want to build wonderful relationships with their students, but we must also demand rigor in all they do. Excellence, whether social or academic, is contagious.
- Encourage staff members to get to know their students, their dreams and aspirations.
- Teach to the students' learning styles and intelligences, so that every student can feel successful.
- Hold high expectations for students. Empower them to make positive decisions and set goals.
- Encourage positive relationships among students by rejecting bullying and teaching tolerance.

- Remind staff that positive and negative teacher attitudes and expectations have profound effects on student achievement, and that caring prompts effort and achievement.
- Identify disconnected students and create a mentoring program within the school to support them.
- Remember that all relationships should maintain professional integrity.

Theory into Practice

In Washington County's Clear Spring High School, the character focus for the past several years has been improving the sportsmanship and conduct of athletes and spectators through the Pursuing Victory with Honor program from Character Counts.

Hanging prominently in Clear Spring High's gymnasium is a banner that reads "Pursuing Victory with Honor." It reminds athletes and fans, including parents and other adults entering the school, of the high expectations of Clear Spring High School. At every athletic event, attendees receive a copy of the school's expectations for spectator behavior. These simple actions communicate to adults the school's commitment to sportsmanship and encourage them to model sportsmanship at all school events.

The Pursuing Victory with Honor Award is one of the most prestigious school awards at Clear Spring High School. This honor is bestowed upon one female athlete and one male athlete. The students are honored at a banquet and are each presented with a trophy. Their names are added to the Pursuing Victory with Honor plaque that is always on display in the trophy cabinet in the front vestibule of Clear Spring High.

During the school year, coaches, the athletic director, and the principal are looking for student athletes who are exemplary on the field and in the classroom. These students accept responsibility for their actions. They demonstrate respect for everyone, athletes and non-athletes, teammates and opponents. They know what the rules are and play by them, not taking advantage of anyone along the way. Not only do they win graciously, they also know how to maintain their dignity upon losing. They carry this attitude with them wherever they go. It's a code of ethics that they live by.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 5

Character education is connected to the curriculum; teachers of all subjects take advantage of “teachable moments” that relate to character.

Creating a school culture of character takes more than a few posters and several morning announcements. Creating this desired culture takes all stakeholders moving toward shared goals for civility, kindness, tolerance, and responsibility. To actualize such a culture, we must educate the minds and hearts of children.

A comprehensive character education approach will use the curriculum as a tool to develop students’ intellectual understanding of the ethical and social issues faced by citizens in a democracy.

Integrating ethical education into the life of a school requires a curricular approach to character education. Assigning responsibility for character education to one teacher or the counseling department, or relying on one course, will do little to affect children’s underlying character. Ideally, character education components are woven into curriculum throughout the

school day. The humanities, sciences, and social sciences are replete with examples and opportunities to expand a student’s understanding of life’s social and ethical issues. This can be accomplished, for example, by teaching tolerance through multicultural readings in Language Arts, or by teaching responsibility through personal fitness goal-setting in physical education class. A course or unit that incorporates character education by teaching conflict resolution, violence prevention, and personal character responsibility can be effective if practices and lesson plans are shared and reinforced throughout the school. Having time to incorporate lessons based on character education will inevitably reinforce the school’s common language and goals for students’ civility. A comprehensive character education approach will use the curriculum as a tool to develop students’ intellectual understanding of the ethical and social issues faced by citizens in a democracy.

Principle 5 Strategies

Strategies to integrate character into the curriculum

- Teach staff how to build character education lessons and core values into daily learning in all subjects.
- Check to see if the district has already established recommendations for schools on integrating character into the curriculum.
- Have teachers share across disciplines their lesson plans and teaching strategies for developing student discussions on important ethical and social issues.
- Choose literature that creates “teachable moments”—that is, literature that focuses on character virtues and multicultural elements, and offers opportunities to identify persons as having good character.
- Discuss historical events in which character attributes are exemplified by historical figures.
- Build relationships with students by sharing personal stories of growth, triumph, and character development.
- Provide students opportunities to practice good character, for example, service-learning projects, cooperative-learning activities, and peer tutoring.
- Recognize individual staff and teams who successfully infuse character into their respective curriculums.

Strategies for implementing a character education curriculum

- Formulate a representative team to create a common language and define the school’s core values.
- Develop and collect resource materials that support the common core values established.
- Create or find activities that reinforce the values of the school and community.
- Correlate the character education curriculum to the achievement standards set by the state and local boards of education.

- Include conflict resolution, violence prevention, anti-bullying, and anti-harassment activities, along with celebrations of diversity, in the school's strategies for developing good character.
- Empower students by giving them opportunities to establish goals, serve others, plan activities and actions, and explore career and college options.
- Develop character-related resources: a quotation list, hero profiles, and a collection of articles from newspapers, magazines, and the Web.
- Share often the purpose, goals, and concepts of the character course so that they may be reinforced throughout the school community.
- Align all other aspects of the character education initiative to this curriculum so that there is a congruence of core values.
- Create a professional library that includes character education resources.

Theory into Practice

At Pyle Middle School in Montgomery County, a class survey in health classes revealed a bullying problem among seventh-grade students. To address the problem, the class conducted an anti-bullying campaign. The students learned about advocacy and proactive behavior, and identified ways to show caring and respect for others in an assertive manner. Working in pairs, students researched different types of bullying (cyber-bullying, in-person bullying, harassment), their risks and consequences, and their effects on both the victim and perpetrator. Students also researched problem-solving strategies and presented their findings on posters that were displayed throughout the school, reinforcing anti-bullying messages schoolwide.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 6

The character education efforts are clearly visible throughout the school.

As stakeholders in our school, we know that a visual representation of excellent work speaks volumes to visitors as they walk through hallways and enter classrooms. We can recite a pledge and listen to thoughtful words about a certain trait, but displays and visual testimonials to our actions echo louder and are farther reaching.

For years, teachers have faithfully displayed their students' best work. Bulletin boards and "best work" boards represent students' academic achievement. Such exemplary work communicates to parents and other visitors the high standards to which students can and should be held academically. Similarly, as an individual

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comes into a school building, there should be immediately visible a bulletin board, banner, or framed picture collage that communicates and celebrates the core beliefs and practices of the school, and the standards of character to which students are held. On this display should be pictures or descriptions of the different ways school stakeholders exhibit exemplary character in their relationships. To reinforce the importance of consistently making the effort, there should also be visible proof that members have met the expectations and have been recognized for their efforts; for example, pictures of individual members accompanied by a written statement explaining why the individuals are being recognized and giving specific examples of their positive behavior speak volumes. As Mark Twain said, "I can live for two months on one good compliment."

Principle 6 Strategies

- Dedicate a prominent spot near the school entrance for a physical display that promotes the school's character education philosophy. Be sure this is not a "left-over" space, but a prime location that will be seen by all stakeholders.

- Designate someone to maintain an accurate, current display. Keeping the information current is essential to gaining the interest and support of the community.
- Purchase or make available at all times a camera to make visual displays possible. A picture is worth a thousand words!
- When a student is recognized, send home a written “Trait-o-Gram” (a brief communiqué in a telegram format) that lets parents know their child has been honored and encourages them to visit the school to see the recognition.
- Set the expectation that when staff members are recognized, there will be some type of indication made in their personnel file to show they supported and promoted positive citizenship in their school.
- Display news articles about the school and its stakeholders.
- Develop a “compliment tree” in the school and/or classroom. Individuals can thank others who have made a positive impact in their lives. The compliments can be written on leaves, apples, etc. Once a month, remove the compliments from the tree and give them to those people who inspired the compliments.

Theory into Practice _____

Harford County’s Joppatowne Elementary School maintains a strong visual display of character through its Best Stars program. Each month, the school holds a separate assembly for the primary and secondary grades to celebrate the successful practice of a certain character trait. Each classroom teacher recognizes one student from his or her classroom, and that student is recognized as the Best Star for the month. The students’ pictures are taken and displayed on a Star Wall in the school’s main hallway along with their nomination statements. On Friday, teachers recognize one Joppatowne Star Student from each classroom. The students’ names are read on the morning announcements the following Monday. In addition, the children get to write their names on stars posted on the wall outside their classrooms.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 7

Morning meetings put character education into practice by encouraging adults and students to share and respect each other's social and emotional needs.

We know that students as well as adults have lives both inside and outside of school. And our experiences both inside and outside the school can influence each other. Therefore, it behooves us to consider how we can start the day to ensure a positive experience for all stakeholders in the building.

Morning meetings are a good way to help stakeholders in a school focus on positive practices that will help them meet social/emotional and ethical goals within the school day.

The morning meeting concept is not new. This concept is similar to the middle school advisory period and the high school homeroom. These approaches, if done well, help students connect with their peers as well as the adults in the school. These times are also ideal for sharing information that all stakeholders in the school might find helpful. Notice, the development of a connection requires more than just a few announcements. It should be a time for the “family” to gather to greet each other and address the concerns that arise in any close-knit group. Deb Brown in her book, *Growing Character* (2003), describes her morning meeting,

A common misunderstanding is that morning meetings are just for elementary schools. The truth is that high school students can benefit just as much, if not more, from this opportunity to connect with other students and adults...

Right after the morning announcements, we all come together for a meeting. The students usually sit on the rug and lean back on the big, comfortable floor pillows. I sit in a chair close by. At that time, I make announcements and give students any information they need to take home to their parents. We also share and celebrate good news...Some days there is bad news to share. A family illness or death is sad to share, but is an important part of our caring curriculum... This process is a real community builder. (p. 49-50)

Clearly, a morning meeting can set the stage for a more positive day for all within the classroom or school. A great strength of this format is that it is easily customized to address each school's unique needs. A common misunderstanding is that morning meetings are just for elementary schools. The truth is that high school students can benefit just as much, if not more, from this opportunity to connect with other students and adults, to practice kindness and good manners, and to prepare mentally for a day of learning.

Principle 7 Strategies

- In middle and high school settings where advisory periods or morning meetings are not established, use time at the beginning of a class, before instruction, to review classroom norms, share feelings and thoughts, and set goals. Establish procedures and a time limit to keep these sessions productive and efficient.
- Start each meeting by having students sit on the floor or carpet, or in desks and chairs, in a circle. Going from left to right, or right to left, have them exchange greetings. This can be a handshake, "high-five," or a hug!
- Invite students to thank anyone in the class who helped them the day before or that morning. (This is especially relevant for elementary students who remain with the same students most of the day.)
- In high schools, consider a multiple-grade grouping for the homeroom or advisory period. This will allow seniors to help younger students, as well as younger students to support seniors who may be struggling to graduate. It can also be a good time for older students to inculcate younger students into the hopefully positive "ethos" or life of the school.
- Have middle and high school students bring their breakfast to class occasionally, so the group can "break bread" together. Some groups have even gone as far as bringing covered dishes to share.
- Share important information. Be sure to plan time for discussion if the topic merits elaboration.
- Consider this a good time to discuss current events that could be influencing the students or their community. This might be

especially helpful for those connected to the military during times of conflict.

- Develop service projects that may be sponsored or participated in by the students during the morning meeting time. This is a good time for middle and high school students to gather in a central area for a morning breakfast and then work, for example, cleaning up a stream or serving as buddies to Special Olympic athletes.
- Use the morning meeting to discuss issues that may arise within the life of the classroom. Have students share some of their concerns. This can be done in the actual meeting, or concerns can be placed in a jar beforehand and then discussed during a meeting. This anonymity may help more students to express their concerns. In discussing these group concerns, be careful not to use individual names, and seek input from students on how to resolve the issue.
- Take time to celebrate good news and accomplishments. For example, recognize students who have improved their grades, won an art award, or made the travel volleyball team.
- Consider meeting at other times during the day. Although the term “morning meeting” is used, schools have found success using this type of strategy throughout the course of the day. For example, a school that has a mid-morning break might combine the break with a meeting time, using the time to celebrate successes and intervene in conflicts and other issues.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 8

Morning announcements reinforce the character education initiative.

A focus on a character trait, idea, thought, or quote is an excellent way to start the day and to instill a common thought throughout the school building. Everyone spends a few minutes learning and reflecting on the message that can frame the day and be reinforced throughout the day. A character message during the morning announcements is a powerful method for maximizing impact in a short amount of time. An added benefit is that the message reaches

the entire school, and its positive impact can be seen in the actions and attitudes of both adults and students in the building.

A character message during the morning announcements is a powerful method for maximizing impact in a short amount of time.

Morning announcements allow the school to hear a common message on what is worthy and important within the life of the school. Yet if this is all we do to promote the development of character, we will fail. Using morning announcements to focus all stakeholders on the school's character goals is just one tool from the

box for focusing and reminding stakeholders of what is important in the school. What we do the rest of the day will determine how well we succeed.

Principle 8 Strategies

- If your school broadcasts the morning announcements on closed-circuit television, use the school's character display as the background for the broadcast. The display may feature the month's virtue, thus emphasizing a target virtue visually rather than with words, a strategy that will be especially effective in reaching the school's visual learners. A bold and colorful backdrop will capture viewers' attention.
- Make positive affirmations, character quotes, daily words of wisdom, or thoughts of the day a part of every daily announcement.
- Invite a staff member, school visitor, student, custodian, or office staff member to deliver the daily message. He or she can add personal examples or interpretations of the message. For example, a message about caring may be presented by, or about, a person working within the building (e.g., custodian, teacher, cafeteria worker) who continually demonstrates a caring attitude toward others.
- Involve all staff in sharing the message of good character. A daily, identifiable, and meaningful phrase such as the school motto or creed can be repeated by students and staff members alike at the end of morning announcements.

- Ensure a consistent character language is used during morning announcements and throughout the school. A principal's daily message to staff may include the monthly virtue along with examples and suggestions for practicing the virtue during the day.
- Consider using skits or role-plays to capture the attention of students and staff. These visual displays model positive choices, decisions, and actions. Base the skits on real situations occurring in your school. Then have the students act out their skits over the closed-circuit television or via the morning announcements.
- Incorporate the use of music into the announcements; for example, play character-education specific songs or any music that will capture the attention of students.
- Use the morning announcements to identify students and staff who display exemplary virtues. Students and teachers may identify others displaying positive virtues by writing a complimentary statement, citing the virtue and describing the positive act. Compliments are placed in a box available in each classroom, and many of them are read on the morning announcements. All are discussed within the given classroom, and students are praised publicly.
- Consider designating students exhibiting positive behavior as the Respectful Student of the Day (or week, month, etc.).
- Consider using the morning announcements as a time to teach children about national holidays, important historical events, and individuals in history showing positive character traits.
- As a follow-up to a weekly character lesson, consider inviting students to present their own skit, poem, story, etc. on the morning announcements.
- Alert parents to a child's upcoming "performance" on the morning announcements. This generates an enthusiasm that is carried home and reinforces the character traits established at school. Parents are more likely to buy into character education when they see a direct connection to their child.

Edgewater Elementary School in Anne Arundel County uses recurring characters in a popular sketch series to illustrate character during the morning announcements. After being introduced by the music of “Green Acres,” the music and art teachers don large snouts and reenact real-life scenarios as “The Piglets.” One piglet consistently finds herself having made poor choices while the other piglet finds a way to redirect her friend, describing the current virtue and explaining how to better solve her problem.

One popular skit was a lesson on the virtue of patience. It began with one piglet quietly reading a library book when the second piglet abruptly snatched the book from the first. The first piglet patiently explained that if the second piglet wanted to read the book, she should first ask politely, then offer suggestions such as taking turns and reading the book together. The second piglet acknowledged these suggestions and was willing to try the new approach to the problem.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 9

Partnerships with businesses and communities support school and community character-building efforts.

To make the most significant, positive difference in children’s lives, schools should try to extend character education beyond the school. Parents, families, businesses, and communities—all can join the effort to develop good character.

Partnerships between schools and businesses are valuable in developing a school’s character initiative. Families, teachers, students, government leaders, business leaders, clergy leaders, and civic organizations can work together to ensure that students are exposed to positive role models. When their overlapping involvement is woven into a child’s life, he or she receives the support needed to grow into a healthy citizen and productive member of the community.

Partnerships give business leaders, civic organizations, and religious affiliates an opportunity to contribute to the character education process. To maintain its efficiency, the partnership should be beneficial to both the school and the outside community. It is

important to recognize that financial gifts, although nice and welcomed, are not the priority of partnerships. What may be most beneficial is the time adults spend mentoring students.

Matching the right activity to the right contributor is essential. Match thoughtfully and with input from the contributor. There are many ways for businesses and community organizations to contribute to schools.

Here are just a few: service projects, internships for students, mentoring, job shadowing, tutoring, participating in career day, holding workshops for parents, sponsoring fund-raisers, providing

resources (school supplies, expertise for staff trainings, incentives for teachers and students, etc.), supporting needy families in the school, and joining the school's character education team or committee.

Partnerships between schools and businesses are valuable in developing a school's character initiative.

Mentoring is a powerful way for communities to support schools, because it provides an opportunity for positive role modeling, academic support, and practice forming relationships with new individuals based on trust and caring. Since character education promotes development of positive behaviors and respectful actions, mentoring is an excellent path to pursue in reinforcing these expectations and goals. It is often said that children learn best by example. A relationship developed through mentoring has as its foundation the principle that the mentor will provide leadership and guidance for the mentored. When volunteers from businesses, civic and religious organizations, and the community are willing to volunteer their time, school staff should work hard to ensure their time and talents are put to effective use. Mentoring's fruits are well worth the labor.

Principle 9 Strategies

Developing and maintaining partnerships

- Develop well-defined, well-managed partnerships that support school initiatives. To ensure consistent, dependable communication, and to respect the time of the community/business representatives, designate one dependable, knowledgeable person to serve as the contact person for the school.

- Carefully match contributors to activities. Communicate with the contributors. Listen to them and ask questions so that you understand their goals, then suggest a match that benefits both school and contributor.
- Set clear expectations for the school and the partner. The chance of a misunderstanding or disappointment is reduced when both parties are clear about each other's role.
- Recognize your partners. It is very important to recognize your partners by inviting them to the school for a special event, such as a breakfast or evening assembly recognizing their support and participation. In addition, set up a partnership page in your school newsletter. This will be a nice advertisement for the contributor and lets the community know who is supporting the school.
- Display a partnership board/tree in the school lobby. Make visible the names of the community contributors.
- Try to avoid dual (competing) contributors. In other words, if you have one ice cream shop as a partner, don't recruit another.
- Monitor and reevaluate partnerships. Develop plans collaboratively to improve or to be more efficient.
- For more resources and ideas, consult The Daniels Fund Web site, www.danielsfund.org. Particularly useful is a chart showing potential pitfalls and ways to avoid them when establishing and working with partnerships in business.

Establishing effective mentoring partnerships

- Identify individuals interested in participating in a mentoring program.
- With the school principal (and other administrators), identify clear expectations for the mentoring program. This is a critical step that can help you avoid potentially embarrassing delays (e.g., a mentor waiting while the school decides how to use him/her).
- Identify a mentoring program coordinator to ensure there is a consistent contact person.
- Ask faculty and staff to identify students they feel would benefit from mentoring.

- Check with local churches, civic organizations, area businesses, area educational institutions, and the Big Brother and Big Sister organizations for leads on potential mentors.
- Contact high schools to identify potential student mentors for middle and elementary students. Many high school students need citizenship or service-learning hours and are eager to participate.
- Be sure to follow the security measures of the school and district. For example, mentors are likely to need to be fingerprinted.
- Match students and mentors thoughtfully, taking care to connect the mentor's skills to the student's needs.
- Train the mentors. Take a day to orient them to the school, explain procedures and expectations, and help them understand what a mentor is and is not, which behaviors are appropriate and which are not (e.g., gift-giving, meetings outside of school).
- Train the teacher(s). Explain the teacher's responsibilities (e.g., ensuring the mentor and child stay in the classroom) and each mentor's duties.
- Create a schedule. Creating a schedule informs all participants of the time and place where the mentor will be working with a student.
- Set clear guidelines. Creating guidelines for both the mentor and the teacher ensures both understand the program's expectations. It is unwise for the teacher to use a mentor for "busy work" such as making copies. Similarly, it would be unproductive for mentors to pursue duties not related to their intent of helping students.
- Obtain parents' permission to have a mentor work with their child. Make clear in writing that any interaction with mentors after school is not supported by the school, and make sure parents acknowledge their understanding in writing.
- Meet regularly with the student, teachers, and mentors (separately) to assess progress and solicit feedback on the program. Continue to monitor and reevaluate the program with the input given.

- Consider removing students who are not making progress over time.
- Evaluate the program; consider checking the grade-point averages and office referrals of mentored students to see if they have improved.

Theory into Practice

Multiple partnerships are used in a variety of ways to carry messages of character at Edgewater Elementary School in Anne Arundel County. Local government officials visit the school each month and are guest speakers on the morning announcements. Speakers are asked to share how their education, and especially personal character traits, made them the leaders they are today, also, how these character traits contribute to their daily lives and actions. Another partnership with a local karate school also focuses on messages of character. The karate school's director, and other business and community leaders, periodically attend the school's quarterly assemblies and speak of the importance of good personal habits and traits, and how they make them who they are. All speakers agree to focus on responsibility, punctuality, attendance, and organization. Additionally, the school has invited a professional soccer team manager to speak at an assembly about the difference between a great athlete and a total athlete, who is not only the best player, but is also cooperative, respectful, and a team player.

In Anne Arundel County, Fort Smallwood Elementary expanded its business partnerships from five to 44 within three years. Initiated and matched to activities by the partnership coordinator, businesses support the school in numerous ways. For example, a local ice cream shop sponsors quarterly incentives to support the reading program. Civic organizations such as the Society of Engineers provide teacher in-services to support math and science instruction. A small computer business offered workshops for parents on how to monitor their child's My Space Web page. A partnership with a clothing store funds programs on safety, nutrition, and character. This partnership also supports the school's fundraising activities for a large service-learning project. Incentives awarded at monthly character assemblies

were funded through partnerships with a local car dealership, catering company, bank, and restaurant. Students recognized for academic and character excellence were awarded a savings bond and a free dinner with their families. In all of these partnerships, matching the business to its potential in servicing the school was vital.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 10

School assemblies emphasize and recognize good character.

“Everybody loves to be recognized. We are all proud when someone gives us credit for our ideas,” says Steve Dixon in the *Elementary School Guide to Character Education* (2001). “When our peers and community share in the recognition, the sense of accomplishment is even greater, and this is equally true for adults and children.”

Remember:

What you celebrate

is what you validate.

In many schools we have assemblies to celebrate excellence. We often celebrate those who have excelled in academics, athletics, arts, vocational education, and other areas; therefore, we should consider holding recognition assemblies for students who are exhibiting good character. Assemblies communicate to all stakeholders that what is being recognized is important.

Of course, schools should not stop holding the more traditional academic and athletic assemblies. These are important parts of the life of a school. But all excellence that is valued within an educational environment deserves recognition. Character is no exception. We should recognize those who spend their spare time serving others. We should recognize students who work hard in student government or in peer mediation. We should recognize students who are working hard to improve their behavior or their academics. In other words, if we value excellence, then we should recognize it publicly and with enthusiasm!

Principle 10 Strategies

- Recognize and celebrate good sportsmanship on the day after a sporting event over the intercom or school television network. This recognition is well-received and appreciated when it is made by the team's coach. Fans as well as players should be thanked for their good sportsmanship.
- Hold assemblies to celebrate improvements in school climate. This may be a good time to have teachers share what they have done as a class to promote a more respectful climate.
- Encourage the music department to develop songs that reflect a character theme. Some of the most effective elementary and middle school assemblies have each grade level present a song about good character. This allows all the other students to recognize and celebrate their accomplishment.
- Reach out to the social, religious, and athletic organizations of your students. Ask these organizations to contact the school when students have exemplified good character. The school can then recognize the efforts of the students outside of the school environment while tying the school to the outside life of the student.
- Consider holding character assemblies at which outside groups present programs on positive themes and reinforce the school's efforts to develop character.
- Inform students of efforts to improve school climate during the announcements and assemblies. Students should know and understand their successes and their failures to help reach the school's goals.
- Take time to recognize the accomplishments of the entire school in your assemblies. It is nice to recognize individual persons, but the efforts of an entire school in meeting social and ethical goals should also be celebrated and recognized.
- In addition to recognizing student athletes with traditional sports awards, such as the most valuable player, recognize student athletes who exemplify the school's character pillars, on and off the field.
- Remember: What you celebrate is what you validate.

Montgomery County's Forest Oak Middle School has established a character recognition event, Celebrating Character, based on the school's pillars of character. Each month a different character pillar is promoted throughout the school. In order to spot acts of good character, everyone in the school has the task of observing one another. Each grade level is divided into two teams, and students identify six students from their team as having displayed that month's character pillar. Winning students are featured on the school's television news show along with the principal, who presents them with a certificate. In addition, their pictures are displayed in the main hall display case, and they enjoy an afternoon of pizza, games, and fun at the Gaithersburg Youth Center.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 11

A positive behavior initiative supports the character education initiative.

We believe that Dr. Frank Crane was right when he said, “Responsibility is the thing people dread most of all. Yet it is the only thing in the world that develops us...” Think of what would happen if everyone in the same school would accept responsibility for his or her own actions. As part of the school's character education plan, some type of positive behavior program should be used to help students and adults develop habits of civility that promote kindness, caring, respect, and responsibility. This could be a positive behavior process such as the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) process, but it could also be another positive behavior initiative.

Teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff should take responsibility and make time to teach, model, and provide opportunities for students and adults to develop positive habits. All adults should seek to develop continuity in what the specific behaviors, e.g. respect, look like in practice. Students at the school can learn what is expected of them, and, through input and practice, develop positive habits. Students who take responsibility to develop such habits will be recognized and rewarded in a variety of ways.

A school staff, working collaboratively with students and other stakeholders, should agree upon a set of expectations to be followed throughout the building. Every school could then post a code of

As part of the school's character education plan, some type of positive behavior program should be used to help students and adults develop habits of civility that promote kindness, caring, respect, and responsibility within the school.

conduct, as well as behavior expectations by location (e.g., classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, bathrooms, playground). As they are role models for the school, staff members are encouraged to demonstrate the desired behaviors. Sufficient time should be allocated toward teaching and practicing the schoolwide expectations. Explicitly showing students what is expected, and then asking them to practice it, makes following the expectations part of the schoolwide climate. Consistent consequences for not meeting expectations should be established and adhered to for

all students so as to maintain a fair and caring environment for students and staff alike. The ultimate goal is to build a sense of cooperation among all stakeholders. This will lead to an overall positive school climate.

Additionally, a monitoring system should be in place to analyze discipline data in order to respond appropriately to trouble spots. (For example, data may identify a particular location, type of behavior, time of day, or number of repeat referrals as a trouble spot.) This data should be communicated at least monthly to all staff members. This can be done through the school improvement team, committees, or grade-level team meetings.

Many Maryland schools use a positive behavior process to create safer, more effective schools. Such a process can improve a school's ability to teach and support positive behavior, and it can be used in conjunction with character education. It can also generate valuable data on climate, behavior, and other areas that can inform the school's character education initiative.

Principle 11 Strategies

- Commit to making the school a character education/positive behavior initiative site.
- Include the positive behavior initiative in the school improvement plan.
- Form a character education/positive behavior committee and provide members sufficient time during the school day to effectively plan and implement the school's character education and positive behavior initiatives.
- Review data (discipline, attendance, academics, climate surveys, etc.) from the previous year in order to identify what changes need to be made for the school to have a more positive, safe, and orderly environment.
- Include staff surveys in the data collection. The staff should use data to select the behaviors and expectations to be communicated.
- Direct adult stakeholders and students to work together to develop consistent practices. For example, students can discuss what respect looks like and work with teachers to develop several practices that will promote respect within the school.
- Teach specific behaviors and expectations. Students learn from hearing and doing. They should have the opportunity to practice and demonstrate a clear understanding of the expectations (for example, morning routine, hallway behavior, dining room/cafeteria behavior, auditorium behavior, school bus behavior). Consider publishing the behavior expectations in the students' agendas.
- Once the desired expectations have been taught and are in place, implement a system of positive rewards and incentives to recognize students and staff. For students, this may include making phone calls home or awarding them tokens that can be redeemed at the school's store or at area businesses. For teachers, business partners may donate a gift card, or the principal may offer nonmaterial rewards such as leaving 15 minutes early, enjoying an extended lunch period, or a casual dress day.

- Decrease extrinsic awards as the school year progresses and habits of good behavior are developed.
- Consider issuing “positive referrals” that salute students for making good choices or excelling academically. Also consider year-end assemblies and recognition programs to recognize students who have excelled behaviorally. The criteria for this recognition should be introduced to parents and students at the beginning of the school year and reinforced throughout the year.
- In addition to schoolwide expectations, clearly defined consequences should be put in place for inappropriate behavior. The consequences should be tiered to match the varying severity of offenses, and should take into consideration the school board’s policy outlining socially acceptable behavior.

Theory into Practice

Stemmers Run Middle School in Baltimore County has fused its Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) process with character education to create a positive school climate.

Each morning after the Pledge of Allegiance, everyone in the school recites the Code of Conduct. Students collect “High Five Stamps” throughout the school day for demonstrating the desired behaviors outlined in the school’s Code of Conduct and Behavior Matrix, which describes the location-specific behaviors that are expected of students as they move through the building. The monthly referral report is used to determine what the character lesson and focus for the following month will be.

Incentives are planned monthly and reward those students who have shown positive behavior changes. The school also holds students accountable for their decisions. The school outlines student consequences on a chart that teachers call the “Tool Box.” Teachers and administrators are encouraged to follow the school’s discipline “Tool Box” with the daily expectations and consequences for poor choices.

Since Stemmers Run infused PBIS and character education into the school environment six years ago, it has seen many positive trends. As the number of office referrals has decreased, overall

academic achievement has increased. This academic progress is a clear indication that as PBIS/character education becomes part of the school culture, everyone benefits.

In Garrett County's Northern Middle School, staff combined all of the individual character education program components into one character education action plan. This action plan has a mission statement with three major objectives: to provide a safe, yet realistic, and more effective school environment, to improve the school's ability to teach and support positive behavior for all students, and to reinforce character education for all students and all staff in all settings. Positive behavior incentives are an integral part of this character education action plan.

Northern Middle School conducts a needs assessment to determine the areas on which it will focus. During the 2006-07 school year, the school focused on respect. This focus was intentionally taught and reinforced on the morning announcements. Then, students who positively displayed this character trait were rewarded with positive incentives and verbal praise for demonstrating respect for self, learning, others, and the environment.



SCHOOL PRINCIPLE 12

Service-learning and reflection are a part of the school's character education initiative.

To be truly meaningful and internalized, character education must be something that is done by all students. It is fine to read about caring and kindness. It is better to develop the habit of caring and kindness via action. Service for others communicates

that the server is capable of putting the needs of another before his or her own.

Service-learning is a natural component in an effective character education program.

Further, service-learning offers numerous

potential benefits for students: improved academic skills, strengthened character, lifelong civic participation, and improved workplace and personal development skills. Service-learning also impacts positively on the community. Ideally, students will become

Service-learning is a natural component in an effective character education program.

more caring, responsible, respectful citizens through service-learning. In fact, character education is built into the implementation of service-learning.

Through the student service-learning graduation requirement, the Maryland State Department of Education has acknowledged the beneficial impact of service-learning on the civic knowledge, civic engagement, academic success, and character and social development of students. The Department has also published *Maryland Student Service-Learning Guidelines*, a helpful booklet that outlines seven “best practices” in service-learning and provides examples of each.

Principle 12 Strategies

- Integrate service-learning into the curriculum and tie it to character education so that students better understand the purpose of helping others.
- Encourage students to reflect on the character traits they practiced by serving others. This can be done via a matrix or through a letter to a teacher. It is equally important that students get feedback regarding their efforts and their insights.
- Name the service-learning coordinator and advisory team to oversee the activities within the school. This team would function within the character education team to link service-learning with existing character development initiatives.
- Encourage staff and students to reflect on service-learning projects, as well as existing practices within the building, and how they relate to the development of character within the school.
- Imbed service-learning within the school’s annual action plan using the same language found in character education initiatives.
- Make in-service opportunities available to all staff to assist in the organization and implementation of character-driven service activities for students.

Theory into Practice

Since 1999, Frederick County's Catoctin High School has hosted an annual Empty Bowls Banquet/Choralfest/Art Show, a beloved event that entertains while it educates the community about local and global hunger and poverty issues, advocates for action to address these issues, and raises money for organizations that fight poverty and hunger.

This interdisciplinary, multi-grade project exemplifies the interdependence of character education and service-learning. Students exhibit not only caring for others but also responsibility. Students create ceramic bowls for the event which are then auctioned off to raise money to combat hunger. Participants are served soup by students and learn about poverty and hunger issues from guest speakers. During the event, students serve soup, collect money and manage the silent auction. Even the students' choral performance celebrates good citizenship, as the students sing songs with themes such as responsibility.

The event is a community project—students, staff, family members, community organizations, and feeder schools all get involved.

Another Frederick County school, Thurmont Middle School, created a unique service-learning project that focused on two aspects of character: citizenship and caring. Students from Thurmont Middle and El Chague, Nicaragua, participated in a sister-school partnership as part of the seventh grade social studies curriculum. Students learned about life in El Chague during classroom lessons and by writing to each other throughout the school year. Thurmont Middle students learned that they had many things in common with the Nicaraguan students, including many of the same challenges. This realization helped broaden the students' view of citizenship to a global perspective.

During this correspondence, Thurmont Middle students discovered the Nicaraguan students' poverty. As a result, the Thurmont Middle students collected school supplies and other necessary materials for their sister school. Through these caring acts, both sets of students learned about each other.

In Anne Arundel County, Bodkin Elementary School has undergone an evaluation of its existing character education

initiatives and has included more student-generated service-learning opportunities. Bodkin developed a working partnership with Rachel Blair, founder and director of Kindness in Action, a nonprofit organization devoted to helping children in third-world countries. Mrs. Blair agreed to work with each of the 26 classrooms (K-5) to, in her words, “plant the seed of kindness.” She exposed students to the real-life circumstances of children their own ages around the world, and rather than exploit the poverty conditions, she illustrated the beauty of their culture. She shared her current projects in India, the Ukraine, and other third-world countries via hands-on activities, kindness ceremonies, and opportunities to experience the dress, language, and practices of these children.

Students began to make connections. In addition to being excited by Mrs. Blair’s presentations, children began to ask, “What can we do to help?” Classrooms began to complete student-generated projects to benefit India (e.g., pencil drives, homemade journals with crayons, letters to children, fundraisers to buy school clothing and supplies). Mrs. Blair returned to Bodkin with beautiful slides of the children receiving the gifts. The slides also depicted the children in India learning about the students and seeing the pictures.

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